

# Global Business Languages

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## Introduction

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## INTRODUCTION

Research in languages for the professions has increased steadily during the last decade as the need for competent communicators of foreign languages and cultures has become greater. The US government along with industry recognizes that the nature of confrontations in the post-Cold War era has changed from potential military conflicts to global economic competition. University students therefore must be prepared for tomorrow's challenges in the globally competitive economy. Americans working in the export sector or in overseas markets will surely need a sensitivity to a variety of cultures and a knowledge of languages in addition to English. Similarly, foreign competition in home markets will become keener and to those who understand how to negotiate with peoples from these cultures and languages will have an edge. There will be few working situations in the United States in the 21st century that will not involve interaction with speakers of languages other than English. CEOs and employers of multinational companies increasingly recognize the importance of having their representatives be flexible and knowledgeable about others, in short, capable of responding sensitively to another way of doing business and to another way of approaching problem solving. It is therefore crucial for anyone involved in educating tomorrow's managers and leaders to realize that whether a person engages in a career of international affairs or is hired by a local business that serves a multilingual community, knowledge of a language other than English, and along with that, an appreciation for the culture of the peoples speaking that language, is basic. The ability to persuade and communicate internationally may well play an increasingly important role for the United States as it competes globally and strives to maintain its economic edge in the year 2000 and beyond.

It is in part with this challenge to a largely monolingual United States citizenry that the federal government, through the Department of Education, created Centers of International Business Education and Research (CIBERs) at various universities throughout the country. The CIBER at Purdue University, established in 1992, serves as a local, regional, and national resource to students, faculty, and the business community. One of the Center's mandates is to assist in internationalizing the curriculum of the School of Management, a mandate that fits well with the call five years ago by Purdue's President Beering for internationalizing each

School within the university. CIBER therefore supports teaching and research, particularly, facilitating development of interdisciplinary research and teaching in courses that have increased international content across the curriculum. The Center's international research funding for faculty substantially impacts on international research at Purdue in the areas of business, agriculture, engineering, and foreign languages.

Faculty in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures have developed 10 new business languages courses in conjunction with our CIBER in the last four years. Eighty-seven language courses for business and technology have been offered at Purdue University since CIBER's inception in 1992. These include courses for our students as well as for the business community in Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish. In addition to funding faculty for research and development in these areas, CIBER has also been able to fund a doctoral student for dissertation research. In the last two years the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures has also created a program that enables graduate students to go overseas for one semester during their studies toward the M.A. degree. Through our International Programs Office at Purdue, undergraduate students are encouraged to study abroad for a year, or a semester, regardless of their major.

With increased teaching and research activity at Purdue and on a number of university campuses throughout the US in this relatively young academic field, and very few publications to date devoted exclusively to this area, we felt a need to create a refereed platform to communicate and to stimulate research results in all aspects of global business languages. Our new annual publication, supported by CIBER and the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, entitled *Global Business Languages*, was created with this need in mind. For the first issue we chose "Pedagogy in Languages for Specific Purposes" as a theme. It is the hope of the editors and the national editorial board that this publication brings to you, its readers, results of important research, both theory and praxis, that will give rise to fruitful ideas and lively discussions, and that it will assist in developing or expanding curricula with a specific focus on the professions and a special emphasis on language and culture.

The articles in this first volume cover a wide range of topics related to the pedagogy of business language, from far reaching theoretical explorations of the role of business language instruction in its current interna-

tional contexts, to quite specific approaches and materials as they have been used in the classroom. In addition to this diversity of perspectives, a number of different business languages are discussed: Chinese, French, Japanese, and Spanish. Because all the articles are written primarily in English, we invite our readers to consider all of them, rather than just those written in their own language(s) of expertise, since many of the basic concepts and techniques can easily be transferred from one language to another.

Bruce Fryer looks ahead to the twenty-first century in his analysis of current and future global needs and the role that business, and the languages of business, will play in physical, biological, economic, political, and information processing systems. He examines the concept of the international marketplace before discussing the role of the language(s) of business. Professor Fryer refers to specific studies at the University of South Carolina that indicate the importance for students of developing strong listening skills, and he elaborates on the increasing needs for translation and interpretation skills. A concerted effort between higher education and the professional workplace is required to meet the needs of tomorrow's citizens.

The two articles in the next section of the annual present programs that take advantage of educational opportunities outside the traditional classroom setting, allowing students to learn in a "real" environment. James Gerber describes the Borderlink Program, a joint venture linking the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California in Tijuana with San Diego State University. The Program emphasizes the "mechanics of research and information gathering in a binational region" as teams of students gathered material to produce a handbook on economic issues of the area. The process-oriented project serves as a model for the vital kind of information exchange necessary in the Tijuana-San Diego area in order to facilitate commerce and reduce counterproductive cultural preconceptions. While students at San Diego State live in a bicultural region, those at Boise State must travel much farther from campus to learn about business in another language and culture. Gary McCain, Nina M. Ray, and Jason T. Ellsworth describe a three-week study tour program in Mexico that provides their students an opportunity to examine cross-cultural differences and similarities with regard to marketing practices. One clearly articulated approach of the program was that students should "develop intercultural communication and research

skills and seek cultural immersion through personal interaction.” To achieve this, students chose a personal topic of interest to research while in Mexico with an eventual aim of preparing a written report, in addition to keeping a daily journal of experiences and observations.

The rest of the articles in the annual focus on various methods and techniques that instructors have found useful in the classroom. Professors Angelini and Hong emphasize cross-cultural issues in the business language classroom, and so their work will be considered first in a section entitled “Teaching World Cultures.” This important topic, as it relates to pedagogy as well as in other contexts, deserves even more attention, and is the theme of our next volume.

In order for her students to understand both an American and a French perspective to a cultural issue, Professor Angelini established a series of activities centered around Jacques Toubon’s law that would prohibit the use of certain foreign words in French. Students explored ways in which both English and French have borrowed words from each other, and then they read articles about the proposed law from American and French journals. Finally, they created role playing situations to illustrate various implications of the law. Through these activities students realized that understanding requires “a give and take on the part of the people of both cultures.” Professor Hong stresses the need to teach business languages in conjunction with foreign cultures as a motivational key for students, and as a means of improving their communicative skills. It is her concern that America will not be as competitive in future commercial ventures in China if business leaders do not understand better both the languages and cultures of the region. She proposes a number of activities, related to social behavior and politeness, which display a contrastive strategy of learning. Professor Hong concludes with a consideration of cross-cultural differences in writing skills that relate to Chinese business letters, invitations, and advertisements.

Some of the first articles in this volume provide details on programs that allow students to leave the classroom and experience business culture first-hand, while the final group of articles describe methods of bringing the business world into the classroom, in order to motivate students and provide real materials of current interest.

A series of exercises using annual reports, slides, and booklets is presented by Professor King, who describes a number of games that facilitate the learning of essential vocabulary and concepts, which can be

followed by oral proficiency exercises, reading exercises, and dramatizations. She has also found the Internet to provide a rich assortment of resources, and gives details of one example involving World Bank information updates in both English and Spanish. In Dennis Parle's article, he relates how Houston's great trade expansion with Mexico has led to both a quantitative and qualitative impact on the University of Houston's commercial Spanish course. Many challenges face the instructor, including the various levels of language ability as well as knowledge of Hispanic culture and business practices. In order to meet these challenges, Professor Parle has expanded the former course to a two-course sequence, and designed learning activities that "take maximum advantage of the advanced experience and knowledge which some of the students bring to the course." He uses a group presentation format to have students present topics to the class, as well as using newspaper and television news reports to reinforce vocabulary. Professor Candia discusses a program at St. Mary's University of Texas that combines language learning with the student's career interests. Although the linguistic needs of Mexican-American students is quite different from that of "Anglos," strategies were used to integrate learning, so that all could improve their skills with a practical goal of professional use. Many students were motivated to study language skills as they related to their career, and felt they were "learning something of value for a lifetime."

In order to prepare his students for the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Paris *certificat* exam on business, Edward Ousselin has successfully used a communicative approach based on authentic material. In addition to a text, he has used amusing yet pertinent resources: the "Frognet" through electronic mail, the comic books *Obélix et Compagnie* and *Gaston Lagaffe*, and films such as *Romuald et Juliette* and *La Comédie du Travail*. Case studies also proved effective in recreating realistic situations that require students to analyze and problem solve in a team project. The use of case studies is the subject of Salvatore Federico's article, which examines the topic of cross cultural awareness of differences in managerial styles as it relates to the French *cadre*. Because case studies solve actual business dilemmas, are short in scope, and encourage creative thinking, they provide an excellent classroom activity for students to realistically and meaningfully interact in the target language as they better understand a "foreign" perspective in a business situation. Finally, Professor Tabuse presents the example of the Eastern

Michigan University Japanese program as an integrated system of academic, community, and global resources and learning opportunities. Students are provided realistic classroom instruction, allowing them to function well when called upon for community translation, when interacting with visiting Japanese business representatives, and when participating in work-study programs in Japan. Ultimately, as in so many of the articles in this volume, the classroom opens out to the world.

It is our intent to provide interesting and stimulating articles that will guide the reader to a better understanding of various aspects of business languages, to offer practical advice and open up new areas of thought and discussion. That is the business of *Global Business Languages*.

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